

APLOTA PALPELLA (HAWORTH)
(LEP.: OECOPHORIDAE)
REDISCOVERED IN BRITAIN

By P. H. STERLING*

On 23 August 1986, I found a specimen of this obscure Oecophorid moth on an oak tree in Savernake Forest, Wiltshire. The specimen was dead, but in remarkably good condition, hanging from a single spider's thread. I am grateful for the determination of the species to Dr. J. R. Langmaid, who commented that to his knowledge there were no other sightings this century.

The species was last recorded (possibly the only record) in Wiltshire by Meyrick at Ramsbury, on 8th August, 1890 (Meyrick, 1890). He beat the specimen from an isolated elm tree and stated that Heinemann said that the adult rested on tree trunks, although subsequent search of that elm revealed no more specimens.

The larva and habits were described by Wood who discovered a colony of the species in Herefordshire (Wood, 1891). This population was breeding on the moss *Homalothecium sericeum* on an old sandstone wall. The larvae were living gregariously in silk galleries on the surface of the moss, killing it as they progressed. The dead patches of moss were then covered by lichenous growth. The silk galleries were white, but interwoven with moss fragments on the exposed surface. Small larvae were found as early as February, presumably having hibernated, but continued to feed well into late May and early June before pupating in a flimsy cocoon at the end of the gallery.

The mature larva was long and slender, greenish- or yellowish-white in colour, with a purple, irregular sub-dorsal line and a paler purple line along the spiracles. Head and thoracic plate were shining black, anal plate ochreous-brown. In general, younger larvae were more reddish-green.

The adult is described in Meyrick (1928). Adults range in wingspan from 10 – 12mm, and are most easily recognised in the field by the brownish forewings and thorax overlaid with a loose scattering of yellowish scales. They are reputed to be very retiring in their habits, and have never been noted to fly.

The species was formerly widely distributed in southern Britain. Apart from the westerly and central localities mentioned above, there are records in the middle of last century from Hainault Forest in Essex (Emmet, 1981).

The species is obviously not confined to forest habitats, given Wood's discovery, and presumably could be looked for wherever mosses abound. I was examining tree trunks closely for small spiders

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when I came across the dead moth. Perhaps an occasional diligent search of trunks for adults in August, or moss for larvae in May/June might reveal the presence of this insect elsewhere. However, the most promising sites to seek this moss-feeding moth might be in those which have had a long continuity of forest cover, creating the right habitat for a variety of mosses to flourish. Royal Forests are probably a better bet than, say, formerly coppiced woodlands: bryophytes seem to require long periods without disturbance to grow best (Rose, 1976), and the regular coppicing of many woods last century may have exterminated their foodplant and habitat requirements.

I am grateful to Mr. S. M. Palmer, the Wiltshire micro-lepidoptera recorder, for information about the Ramsbury record.

References

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NOTES ON HYPENA ROSTRALIS L. (LEP.: NOCTUIDAE) —

It would seem worthy of placing on record the capture of a single male *Hypena rostralis* (L.), in worn condition, at m.v. light in my garden in Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire on the night of 25 May 1987, (ten Km grid square TL 42). The national distribution shown in *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* **10**, page 389, shows a cluster of dots in the Surrey-Middlesex area, with only a scattered distribution elsewhere. Only eight post-1960 dots appear to be further north than the current record, all widely scattered and the most northerly for Britain being only 40 kilometres north of Bishops Stortford. Foster's 1937 'A List of the Lepidoptera of Hertfordshire' in the *Trans. Herts. nat. Hist. Soc. Fld. Club.* **20**: 157-279, gives Bricket Wood, St. Albans, Hitchin, Cheshunt, East Barnet, Watford, Bushey Heath, Tring, Berkhamsted and New Barnet, all without further comment. It is interesting that most of these localities border the north London area, in the south of the county, and that there are no records from the north-east near Stortford. The 1985 *List of the Macrolepidoptera of the*